

# Joni: pure and natural

by jim leahy

"I've looked at life from both sides now, From up and down, And still somehow, It's life's illusions I recall: I really don't know life at all."

A couple of years ago Joni Mitchell was singing these lyrics to small crowds at the original Orillia-based Mariposa folk festival and in folk clubs in Toronto and Montreal. Now she sings in Carnegie Hall and at large rock festivals (at one of which she left stage in tears). She still returns to Mariposa and to various large halls in Montreal and Ottawa, but her home now is in Laurel Canyon, California (famous for Frank Zappa, Suzy Creamcheese, John Mayall and others).

It would be unfair to judge Joni Mitchell's progress as a singer-composer solely on her recordings, *Song to a Seagull* and *Clouds*. From the guitar accompaniment to the cover art, which she designs herself, practically everything involved in making her two albums what they are, is totally different.

The differences in the cover art provide valid parallels to the differences in the two performances.

The cover for *Song to a Seagull* is done in watercolor, wild with imagination — completely unprofessional, but rich in color and almost naive in its beauty. The cover for *Clouds*, a self-portrait in oils, however, is very professional and very cold.

As far as performance is concerned, *Song to a Seagull* shows Joni Mitchell as a fledgling folk singer with an innocent, almost virginal, approach to her music and her poetry. A song like "Night in the City" is so happy that as the song before it on the album comes to a close, your senses

perk up and your feet get ready to start dancing. Most of the other songs deal with city life compared with country and seaside life:

"I came to the city and lived like old Crusoe On an island of noise in a cobblestone sea"

Throughout the album Joni makes herself vulnerable through an unashamed purging of her sadness and happiness. The voice — pure, thin and flighty at times — is always in complete control of the lyrics and melody. She is, technically, not a good singer, but that is irrelevant. Things like understanding, feeling, and intelligence comprise a great deal of the ability to sing.

The title of her most recent album, *Clouds*, is also the alternate title to "Both Sides Now". One gets the impression that she made the album because she thought people wanted to hear her sing "Both Sides Now". Most people probably think that Judy Collins wrote it.

The few good songs on this album happen to be old Joni Mitchell songs — "Chelsea Morning" (the necessary happy song) "Song about the Midway", "Both Sides Now", and "I Think I Understand", which is the best song on the whole album. This was written as a kind of ode to the Lady Galadriel in "Lord of the Rings".

In a lot of songs on this album, Joni seems to be settling for second best — precious, irrelevant imagery:

"Varnished weeds in window jars  
Tarnished beads on tapestries  
Kept in satin boxes are  
Reflections of love's memories"

An attempt at protest songs fails miserably in her acapella rendition of "Fiddle and the Drum". Even Dylan doesn't do protest songs anymore.

Joni Mitchell lives with Graham Nash (of Crosby, Sills, etc.) in Laurel Canyon. Nash wrote about what it was like living with Joni in the song "Lady of the Island" on the CSN album. This practically ruined her image for me.

And then at this year's Mariposa Folk Festival, she tells us about having mononucleosis. My God, it can't be true! What has happened to the virginal, innocent country girl from Saskatoon who went to New York City and was so upset by what she saw that she dedicated a whole album to it? Is the Americanization of Joni coming to a head?

Gordon Lightfoot wouldn't play at Mariposa (his training ground) unless he made about ten thousand dollars on it. Joni Mitchell plays there every year for \$75, and the people love her. Her concerts are always sellouts in the States.

Only time and her next album will tell what influence America and its big money have had on her. An artist has got to grow and to nourish himself on his environment. Most artists want recognition and acknowledgement of their art. The United States can provide this better than Canada. Most talented Canadian artists make their way to the States eventually. It's completely natural.

I've seen Joni Mitchell twice at Mariposa and once at Place des Arts. With the exception of her piano numbers, almost everything else she does is pure Mitchell. The sound of applause frightens and embarrasses her. Her between-song chatter is nervous and natural. And when she is singing well, the silence of the audience is hers. Similar to the high school amateur folk singer who comes across really well at all those special Christmas concerts. Moments of disbelief when she thinks — here I am singing my songs in front of people — and they're actually listening and liking it!

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ly complicated and leads us back to the original problem. Is it effective? Can we assume that the average listener is willing or capable to listen to this admittedly heavy stuff? If not, should we abandon these experiments? Would we not be guilty of doing the same thing commercial radio has done, namely sacrificing content for listenership?

Some people have said that the average listener, because of the habits imposed on him by constantly listening to commercial radio, would not be willing or capable of listening to a station like this. They have said that we should start at a less obscure point and slowly bring the listener up to this point. Perhaps they are right. We don't know. We'd really dig it if you listen to us just this once and give us your comments.



JONI MITCHELL

## Brandy: Gentle flow

He looks like the world owl were the word owl dressed in brown corduroys. He is Brandy Ayre, a musician whose songs ring of the poetry of New Folk and his own kind of gentleness.

Starting from the background of Montreal rock and blues bands, Brandy has evolved into a composer and performer of lyrical and wide ranging musical poetry. Accompanying himself on acoustic guitar with Dave Woolhead on electric bass, he sings mostly his own material. He began writing last year while at McGill, and then spent four months travelling through Europe. He was inspired to write many new songs during his stay in the islands of Greece.

Next week he will return to

London where he has had offers from publishing and recording companies. In addition he is writing the sound track for a new British film "Dulcimer".

Brandy believes that "the revolution is within yourself". That stress makes his music yield to many different directions.

John Anthony of Mercury Records of London, friend and manager, calls Brandy's music as "somewhat viscose, or let's say it'll all flow, as soon as the revolution crystallizes."

Brandy has played at the Yellow Door in Montreal and recently went to Bishop's College for a concert. He will be performing tonight at the McGill Folk-Rock Festival in Union Ballroom.



BRANDY

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